

INTERVIEW WITH JIM GRITMAN
BY DOROTHE NORTON AUGUST 18, 2003

MS. NORTON: Good morning Jim!

MR. GRITMAN: Good morning!

MS. NORTON: The interview will be with Jim Gritman who retired from Region 3 and who worked in many other places. We are going to start by learning where you were born and when.

MR. GRITMAN: I was born in Geneseo, Illinois July 16, 1932.

MS. NORTON: So you just had a birthday! And what were your parent's names?

MR. GRITMAN: Orville and Irene Gritman.

MS. NORTON: What were their jobs and education?

MR. GRITMAN: My father worked for the public service company in Illinois and my mother was a homemaker.

MS. NORTON: Where did you spend your early years, all in Geneseo?

MR. GRITMAN: Yes, until I was seventeen.

MR. NORTON: What did you do during your early years? Did you have any special hobbies, or books or special events?

MR. GRITMAN: Yes, I loved to hunt and fish. I also played baseball and football.

MS. NORTON: Did your dad help you with the hunting and fishing? Did he get you started?

MR. GRITMAN: Yes, my dad and my two Uncles.

MS. NORTON: Did you have any jobs like a paper route?

MR. GRITMAN: Oh yes, I was a paperboy. I worked in a grocery store. I worked one summer on the railroad. When I worked on the railroad, there were only two of us that were white out of a crew of twenty-eight. The foreman was white and all the rest were either black or Hispanic or Mexican. It was quite an experience for a sixteen year old.

MS. NORTON: I'll bet! But it's good though, you learned early about being able to accept other cultures. So you graduated then, from Geneseo High School? What year did you graduate?

MR. GRITMAN: Yes, in 1950.

MS. NORTON: What university did you attend?

MR. GRITMAN: Well, right out of high school, I joined the Marine Corps.

MS. NORTON: How many years did you serve in the Marines?

MR. GRITMAN: A little over three years.

MS. NORTON: What were your duty stations?

MR. GRITMAN: Camp Lejuene, North Carolina, the Mediterranean, and Korea.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever get any decorations?

MR. GRITMAN: No.

MS. NORTON: So did your military service relate in any way to your employment with the FWS?

MR. GRITMAN: In a small way. When I was stationed at Camp Lejuene, they had some bad fires in North Carolina. We were called to help on those. That kind of got me interested in the Forestry end of it.

MS. NORTON: So when you got out of the military, you went to college?

MR. GRITMAN: Yes.

MS. NORTON: And what university did you attend?

MR. GRITMAN: The University of Missouri in Columbia.

MS. NORTON: What did you get your degree in, and when?

MR. GRITMAN: I got my degree in Forestry in 1958.

MS. NORTON: Did you go back for a masters of anything?

MR. GRITMAN: I did graduate work at the University of Georgia in Athens. Then I did some schooling when I was with the FWS in Washington, D.C. I went to George Washington University and did some additional graduate work.

MS. NORTON: So now I'm going to ask you how and when and where you met your wife.

MR. GRITMAN: At the University of Missouri. She was going to Stevens University, or Stevens College when I met her. Then she transferred from Stevens over to the U and she finished.

MS. NORTON: When and where did you get married?

MR. GRITMAN: We got married in 1956 in Sioux City, Iowa.

MS. NORTON: I know that you have children. Can we have their names, and what they are doing now?

MR. GRITMAN: I have one daughter, the oldest who is Julia, or Julie as we call here. She is a teacher in Hopkins, Minnesota. The middle daughter, Jamie, is a Dental Assistant in Bismarck, North Dakota. And the youngest daughter, Jennifer, lives in Excelsior, Minnesota. She works with handicapped children. She is a teacher's assistant.

MS. NORTON: Oh that's great, we need more people like that. Now we'll go to your career because you probably have more to say about your career. Why do you think you wanted to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service?

MR. GRITMAN: When I got out of college, I went to work for a forest products company in [unintelligible], Oklahoma. The name of it was Dirks Forest Incorporated. It was later sold and Weyerhaeuser now has it. It was a privately owned company and they had two million acres of forestland in Arkansas and Oklahoma. I was in the Oklahoma block and worked for them for six years. I got as high I thought I could go because it was company owned. The only way I could go higher was if my boss died. I decided that I should look for employment elsewhere. I had hunted at Tishomingo Refuge and got to know the Refuge Manager down there. I kind of liked refuges and one of the fellows that I worked for was a guy named John Burwell. When I told him I was thinking of leaving the company he asked me if I would be interested in working for the FWS. He had a brother Bob Burwell who was the Regional Director in Minneapolis. They were just starting a Forestry Program and he wondered if I would be interested. I told him that I sure was. So I wrote a letter and they told me to apply. I did and I was hired at the Necedah Refuge. My title was Area Forester, and I had the Cedar Refuge and the Upper Mississippi Refuge.

MS. NORTON: When did you start with FWS?

MR. GRITMAN: 1964.

MS. NORTON: What did you do then, when you were in the position of Area Forester?

MR. GRITMAN: Well, I did a forest management plan, which actually turned out to be a land use plan for the Necedah Refuge. The FWS got a contract from the Corps of Engineers to type map to show what kinds of vegetation was on the islands on the Upper Mississippi River Refuge. Don Gray was the Manager at Upper Miss. He helped me immensely with all of his experience and everything. I'd have to say that he was one of my early mentors. I really liked Don. And I liked all of the assistance and help that he gave me. It was a one-man show for me, mapping all of those islands. At that point in time in my career I thought that if I could ever be the Manager of the Upper Mississippi Refuge that would be "it". That would be the best job I could have.

MS. NORTON: Where did you go from Necedah?

MR. GRITMAN: From Necedah I went in to the Washington Office in Refuges. I was in charge of the forestry program for Refuges. When I say I was in charge of the forestry program, that was setting policy and assisting in coming up with things to be done with the forest resources on refuges. I got to see a lot of the country and a lot of refuges. I got to meet a lot of different people in different regions. It was a very broadening experience. I also did other things when I was in there; I was a Services Representative on the EROS program, which was Earth Resources Observation Satellite program. This was brand new. The only reason I got that job was because no one else wanted it. So I got that. There were other things that I was involved with. In fact, John Gottchalk was the Director at that time. He was the last basically the last non-political appointee we had as Director. One time we were going over for a briefing at the EROS program at NASA. We were riding over in a cab, and I was briefing him about the program on the way over. Then on the way back, we stopped at the Smithsonian for lunch and we got to talking about things. He told me that he thought I knew as little about as many things as he did. But he was a fine, fine gentleman.

MS. NORTON: Where did you go from Washington?

MR. GRITMAN: From Washington I went back Region 3 at the Regional Office as Forest Carpenter's Assistant, or Deputy I should say, in Refuges. I was there for roughly a year and a half. Then I was named Area Manager in Bismarck, North Dakota. In Bismarck, in my estimation was my best job that I ever had in the FWS. You are closer to the resources, and closer to the problems. But I had direct access to the Regional Director at all times. So it didn't take a phone call through fifteen people to get the Regional Director; it took one phone call. I thought we accomplished a lot of things in

North Dakota. A lot of changes were made. A lot of people think that the private lands program of wetland restoration and so forth, that Region 3 started that when I was Director there. But it actually started when we reviewed the Garrison Diversion Mitigation Plan which had been hailed by many people as the best mitigation plan ever written. But when you looked at it on the ground, what the Service was getting were a bunch of alkali areas not suitable for refuges or really for wildlife. We reviewed that and rewrote the mitigation plan. We had it approved in Washington. And the heart of the mitigation plan was to restore drained wetlands. So that's where the restoration first started. It was not an idea I came up with as a Regional Director in the Twin Cities, but it actually started in North Dakota with the mitigation for the Garrison Diversion.

MS. NORTON: From Bismarck, where did you go?

MR. GRITMAN: I went to Denver as the Deputy Regional Director. Harvey Willoughby was the Regional Director. Harvey had been the Deputy in Denver before being named Director. I was very, very happy to work with Harvey. I probably learned more from Harvey and Forest Carpenter about the actual management of the Service and things that went on, than any other two individuals. They were both really very helpful in my career.

MS. NORTON: And from Denver?

MR. GRITMAN: From Denver, I went to Minneapolis as the Deputy Regional Director. That was in 1980. I worked for Harvey Nelson. I can actually say that I worked for one of the most prominent men in Fisheries resources in Harvey Willoughby and worked for Harvey Nelson who was highly thought of in Migratory Bird and especially waterfowl work. I was fortunate that those were two of the people I was able to work for.

MS. NORTON: You became the Regional Director in what year?

MR. GRITMAN: Well, Frank Dunkle was named as the Director of FWS. Frank had previously been the Director of the Montana Game and Fish Commission. He also had run for Governor in Montana. He was defeated. He was a strong Republican, and he had been named as a Special Assistant to the Director but stationed in Denver. He had been with the Service in that capacity so he kind of got to know the service and what went on. He had a pretty good idea of what he wanted done when he became Director. I had been out on a special assignment out in Denver; it had to do with the program management system. I had lunch with Frank Dunkle and Sam Marler and Marv Duncan. At that time, Frank told me that one day, he was going to be the Director of the Service. So I chidingly said, "Well, if you're going to be the Director, I'd better by your lunch!" So I bought him lunch that day. A short time later, he was named as Director. He was the first Director that I know who came in; he was named one day and confirmed by the

Senate and on that same day, two memos came out. One did away with the Program Management System and the other established the chain of command, which was the Director, to the Regional Directors. It was probably one of the biggest changes that occurred so quickly that ever happened in the Service. It was also said that the Assistant Regional Directors in Washington would be staff to the Director and to all the Regional Directors. So that was a big, huge change. And he was very emphatic when he said that each Regional Director 'will be held responsible for everything in their region.' I kind of liked that of him. He asked me if I'd be interested in coming to Washington to serve as the Assistant Director for Refuges and Wildlife. He had this special assignment for me, if I took the job. I asked him what that would be. And he told me it was to cut the staff of Refuges and Wildlife by fifty percent in the Washington office, which I thought was a good idea anyway. When that was done, we agreed that I could either come back to Region 3 as the Deputy or as the Regional Director, one of the two. We had set a time frame of eighteen months to do this in. I went in there in March of 1987 and by December of 1987 the staff had been cut by forty-nine percent. There had not been one single complaint filed by any employee. All of the employees that did not want to retire, but wanted reassignments were reassigned in Grade. That December, my father had a stroke and I called my sister and asked her if she would go be with my parents because I told her I just couldn't leave at that time. I had just a little more to do and I'd be out of Washington. She came out to be with my parents and called me and said that my dad was getting worse and I probably should come home. Frank Dunkle came into my office and said, "Jim, your place is not here. Your place is with your family, they need you now." He said that he expected me to be out of there that day. I said, "Frank, I am so close to meeting my goal. I'd like to stay and meet that. I'd hate to leave here and have to come back." And he said, "How would you like to be the Regional Director in Region 3?" I told him that would be fine. He said that he would see what he could do. This was at eight o'clock in the morning. At eleven o'clock in the morning he came back with a paper signed by the Secretary that I was now the Regional Director in Region 3. So people can say all they want to about Frank Dunkle but he knew how to get things done.

MS. NORTON: When you came to for FWS, how did you feel the pay and benefits were since you had been working in private industry?

MR. GRITMAN: I took a pretty good cut in salary when I came to work for FWS. I started as a GS-7. You take anyone out of college and they've worked for a private company for five or six years, and they have all that experience and come to work as a GS-7, that's quite a jolt. My first supervisor at Necedah Refuge was Carl Pasbushell. I'll never forget the first day I arrived. Carl told me that he didn't need a Forester. He had not asked for me. He had nothing to do with the selection. It was all done in the Regional Office, and that if I stayed out of his way, he'd stay out of mine! I just about quit that day. But then I said to myself, "well, I'll show Carl Pasbushell what I can do!" We did not have a very good beginning. He gave me an old Army surplus pickup to drive while there was a brand new one sitting in the garage that no one used. It kept breaking down

on me and I've have to walk back to HQ because I didn't have a radio. Finally, I'd had all I could take of this when my pickup broke down, and I had to walk in from where I was. I got in to the HQ at 8:30 night. No one had even missed me that I had been gone. No one had come looking for me. I went up to the Refuge Manager's house and told him that I thought that I should have a different pickup and I expected one in the morning. He was very upset with me, the Refuge Manager was. So the next day we had quite a discussion. I told him that I was going to call Forest Carpenter because I could not work under these conditions. So I called Forest who I had never met, but he did know my name anyway. I told him what the problem was and six weeks later, Carl Pasbushell was transferred. We then got Ed Collins in as Refuge Manager. He was an entirely different person, different personality. We hit it off and everything went fine from then on. But my start with the FWS was not that good.

MS. NORTON: Did you socialize with people you worked with? Probably not at Necedah, but as you moved on.

MR. GRITMAN: Well, at Necedah we did. We had a Christmas Party every year. I went fishing or hunting with some of the other employees.

MS. NORTON: What did you do for recreation in the field?

MR. GRITMAN: I hunted and fished and bowled.

MS. NORTON: That was the big thing in Region 3 too!

MR. GRITMAN: Well, with bowling, I had a neighbor....We moved to Tomah, Wisconsin in April. That's about twenty miles from the Refuge HQ. I neighbor came over and asked me if I'd like to bowl on their team. I told him sure, but that I hadn't bowled in about six years. He said that they had six people on the team so that if I couldn't make it, there would always be a substitute. The first night of bowling, I bowled an 89. Everyone was going around asking my friend where he had found 'this guy'. In the second game I bowled 239, so there was a big difference in two games. But it was a lot of fun.

MS. NORTON: How did your career affect your family with all of the different moves and everything?

MR. GRITMAN: Well, the move from Oklahoma to Wisconsin wasn't bad at all. That was a pretty good move. But when we left Tomah and went to Washington, D.C. the children probably cried all of the way. But then they got to Washington and they liked it very well. They liked all of the things that went on. They liked the schools. We lived in Fairfax, VA. When we left there and went to Minneapolis, I think they cried all of the way to Minneapolis because they didn't want to leave Virginia. We were only in

Minneapolis for a very short period of time before I was named Area Manager in Bismarck. They didn't want to leave Minneapolis. They said, "We just got here! We just made friends!" So I promised them they could have horses when we moved to Bismarck. So that took care of that. They decided that wouldn't be too bad of a move. But then, when we moved to Bismarck to Denver, that was a very traumatic move. My oldest daughter had graduated from high school and was just going to start college so the move didn't really affect her too much. But my middle daughter was starting her senior year in high school. She did not want to move at all. Plus, she had a boyfriend. And I can remember telling her that boyfriends come and go. But we got to Denver and it was just before school started. We lived in Parker, Colorado, so the school that she went to was Castle Rock. I was hunting in North Dakota and got a call from my wife. She said that Jamie had just quit school. She asked me what she should do. So I told her that she should call the Principal and get with the Counselor and everything. Well, when my daughter went to the Counselor she was asked what she didn't like about the school. She didn't like the teachers. She didn't like the students. She didn't like the curriculum. And she didn't like Colorado at all. So the Counselor suggested that maybe what she should do would be to take correspondence courses and graduate from high school that way. That is what happened. There was a good correspondence school in Denver. They went and talked to the people there. She had an agreement with her mother that every morning from eight until noon she would study. To make a long story short, she graduated in about four months from high school and then went on to a Veterinary Tech school and did very well. In fact, she said she never learned how to study until she did the correspondence work. So everything worked out okay, but it was a very difficult time period for the family. My youngest daughter; as long as she could have her horse with her, and be with us, she could care less.

MS. NORTON: So you worked until you were eligible to retire?

MR. GRITMAN: Yes.

MS. NORTON: And when did you retire?

MR. GRITMAN: In January of 1992.

MS. NORTON: And you went from a GS-7 to a GM...?

MR. GRITMAN: A CSC-6.

MS. NORTON: What kind of training did you receive when you first started with FWS or was it all on the job learning?

MR. GRITMAN: It was on the job learning really. There was training like in Law Enforcement training when I was at Necedah. I helped and assisted in training some of

the other Foresters who were hired. I worked at Tamarac Refuge with Bob Seymour for a while. He was a Forester there. I was the first one that had completed a Forest Management Plan, or as I used to say, a land use plan. That's really is what it was. There was some Refuge training that went on where you would go through courses, but that was all in service training.

MS. NORTON: And when you went in to Washington so soon in your career; what sort of different things did you learn about, like management?

MR. GRITMAN: More about policy of the Service, and the hierarchy and what went on. It was very enlightening. I probably discovered at that time that there were more "phonies" in Washington than anyplace in the United States. Not necessarily in the Service, but in Washington hierarchy. But it was different at that time. Congressmen did not have all of the help that they now have. There were many times that we would receive phone calls directly from a Congressman. I can remember talking to John Dingle. He called over wanting some questions answered. Now, it's all Assistants who do this work. The Congressman just doesn't hardly get involved. Their staffs have grown tremendously. It was entirely different doing business then from what it is now, especially since the Service has become so politicized. I don't see how you can have the continuity like we had earlier, where people came up through the ranks to become Director. Now you bring in a Director say, from a state that maybe had three hundred employees and now he's got something like eight thousand employees. It's just mind boggling, I think, for any individual to come in like that. I don't think they are prepared.

MS. NORTON: Now when you worked in the Regional Offices, you worked regular hours. But when you worked out in the field, like on a Refuge, or in Bismarck; what kind of hours did you work then?

MR. GRITMAN: When I started at Necedah we were reclaiming some of the water pools there and the management of them. They had grown up in to some Oak and Jack Pine and it just wasn't good for nesting birds at all. One of the things we did was to spray herbicide after we had cut over the Oak and stuff to stop the sprouting so it wouldn't grown into native grasses. My hours then were; I'd start to work at five thirty in the morning and we'd spray until about ten when the wind would come up and we'd stop. Supposedly I was supposed to get off early, but that never happened. It was usually four or five o'clock in the afternoon before I'd leave the Refuge. But it wasn't just me; all the Refuge employees were the same.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever have any special tools or equipment that you used in any of your different positions?

MR. GRITMAN: Yeah, of course in the Forestry end of it there were things that we had such as fire ploughs for fire suppression and also for prescribed burning. Some people

call it controlled burning, but I always called it prescribed because once you set a match, it's not controlled any more. It's burning, but we did it under ideal conditions. Some of the first ever prescribed burning was done at Necedah Refuge. This was in Region 3. In Region 4, they had done it before. I had used it when I had worked for this private company. I was introduced one time to the fire prevention or fire control people in the State of Wisconsin as an individual who had probably started more fires than any of them had ever put out. That was probably true, but they were done under prescribed conditions and so forth. And it really benefited the habitat. Today, they have this experimental Whooping Crane flock and Necedah, which I don't think they ever would have had accept for the use of prescribed fire to change the habitat conditions that were there.

MS. NORTON: Did you work with any of the animals or birds?

MR. GRITMAN: Yeah. When you're on a refuge, you do everything. I assisted in the banding and census programs. We didn't have that many employees and I learned an awful lot.

MS. NORTON: How did you feel toward the animals that you worked with?

MR. GRITMAN: You get very protective. There was a farming line where hunters could hunt right outside the Refuge boundaries. I hated to see that because I had seen some of these families of geese that had been raised on the refuge and you could go out and see two or three of them drop right away. You get kind of a personal attachment.

MS. NORTON: How do you think people outside the agency; like in agency/community relations perceived the Service? Especially in the field stations where you worked?

MR. GRITMAN: In the local field stations, I think they knew that the refuge was there. A lot of people knew what they did at the refuge. But when I first started, Carl Pasbushell would lock the gate at four o'clock in the afternoon and nobody got in the refuge. That all changed when Ed Collins came. He said we couldn't have that. That helped a lot. The programs that the refuges put on; like going to a lot of schools, we talked to a lot of school children and that really helped. But that was all local. Then going from the local area to a statewide area; not very many people knew what a refuge was.

MS. NORTON: When you went to the Regional Office as Deputy and Regional Director, how did you feel FWS was perceived by the public then?

MR. GRITMAN: The same way. Some people had heard of us, and some people hadn't.

MS. NORTON: I know that many people always thought that we were the DNR!

MR. GRITMAN: Yeah, there's always been an identity problem. But I see all of the Public Affairs people that they've added and I don't see where that's done any...it hasn't been any help really. I don't see anything in the Bemidji newspaper about FWS, or very seldom. The only thing I see is like when we set hunting regulations and the framework for waterfowl hunting. Then, the Service is mentioned. Outside of that, there is very little.

MS. NORTON: And you know, even though I am retired, when I see an article in the paper and I know its going to relate somehow to FWS, I read it.

MR. GRITMAN: Yeah, so do I!

MS. NORTON: I think it's just interesting to see what's going on.

MR. GRITMAN: You've got to remember that we're a real small agency.

MS. NORTON: Oh yeah, we really are! And I think that that's why it made it more of a decent place to work.

MR. GRITMAN: Well, you get to know everyone. I knew just about everyone in the Service at one time or another, I had met them.

MS. NORTON: It's like when I worked in Washington, it seemed that whenever there was a job someplace else, it was a higher grade. Everybody would apply to go someplace else. Whereas as in FWS, we rarely lost people to another agency. Well, we did when Postal Service came in, we lost a few. Goodmenson went down there. But it just seemed that everybody was content and happy to be working there.

MR. GRITMAN: It was more of a family. If someone was sick in the Region, everybody knew about it. I don't care if you were in Law Enforcement or Refuges or Fisheries or what.

MS. NORTON: It was kind of just like an extended family. What projects were you involved in?

MR. GRITMAN: Many, but I would have to say that the Garrison Diversion Project in North Dakota was the most important one that I was ever involved in.

MS. NORTON: How about any major issues?

MR. GRITMAN: Well the major issues were of course the drainage of the wetlands. In North Dakota that was really a huge problem. We had many, many easements where we paid the landowner not to drain, burn or kill wetlands on his property. This was for perpetuity, which means it was forever, so if the land changed title and someone else bought it, that easement still stayed. When I went to North Dakota as the Area Manager none of these easements had ever been enforced. In the Devil's Lake District during the first year that we started enforcing the easements we had 300 violations. What we did was to kind of set up our own policy because there was none.

MS. NORTON: Did that help resolve the problems?

MR. GRITMAN: We'd give the landowner three warnings before he was sited. If he didn't restore the wetlands after those three visits it was to federal court where they went. I can say that in the time I was in North Dakota, that in all of the cases that we sent to federal court we never lost a case. It means that Refuge people and Enforcement people really did their homework and had excellent cases. It set the tone for the Service because we also had them in South Dakota and in Minnesota and Nebraska. I think that North Dakota, at that time, led the way.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever feel that you had a major impediment to your job or career other than Carl Pasbushell?

MR. GRITMAN: No. Not really. I think when we made the case we got things done. We had a depredations program in North Dakota. We were the only state that had one. I can remember going to Washington with some local legislators from North Dakota. We had the Commissioner of Agriculture and the Commissioner of Game and Fish. There were two Senators and two other legislators. We went to Washington and met with the Congressional delegation of North Dakota, which only consisted of two Senators and one Representative because of the population. We got their backing and went to the Director and to the Secretary and we got what we called a research program. We would go out when a farmer was having a depredation problem with ducks and geese. The Department of Agriculture people would go out with us and say, 'yes, there is a problem here'. We would get an agreement with the farmer that we'd let the ducks and geese feed in that field and when they had left, and headed south we'd come in and evaluate it. Then he would be paid for the damages that were done. Actually, it was probably cheaper to do that than to have us go out there with [zon] guns and so forth and exploders to try to keep them off the fields. The program worked very well. I don't think anyone was taken advantage of at all.

MS. NORTON: You mentioned some of your supervisors, like Pasbushaw when you started and all. When you went you went to Washington, was Frank Dunkle your supervisor?

MR. GRITMAN: On my first trip to Washington, or the second one?

MS. NORTON: The first one.

MR. GRITMAN: On the first trip to Washington, Gottchalk was the Director.

Side B

...but Refuges did not have a Chief of Refuges at that time. Bill Ackernack was the acting Chief. Fran Gillette had been the Chief and he retired and they hadn't named one. So when I first went in there Bill Ackernack was acting. Then we got an individual from Research who came in at the acting Chief of Refuges. His name was Bob Scott. Bob Scott was really not a very good administrator, but he had excellent staff people. There was Arch Hewlett, Harry Stiles, Bob Balou; these were good people who bailed him out many times. In fact, Bob Scott said that sometimes if you didn't empty your in-box right away, and left things there for three or four weeks, the problem might go away. That was his way of managing. He was not the best manager in the world, but the other people were very good. There was Bruce Stolburg. He was another one. In fact, he was my supervisor when I was in Washington. He was an excellent, excellent individual. They helped me an awful lot.

MS. NORTON: That's good. You had already mentioned a few people who helped shape your career.

MR. GRITMAN: Umhum.

MS. NORTON: Are there any other people that you feel helped with that as you kept moving up higher?

MR. GRITMAN: I can remember the first time I went to Washington I told Ann that leaving a Refuge and going straight to Washington; I didn't want to do it. But I had been called in on special assignment four times in one summer. They kept trying to get me to come in. Finally told Ann that if we went, I might as well see how high I could go. There's so sense in going to Washington and just staying in one job. That was a goal I had. But I never dreamed I'd end up being a Regional Director.

MS. NORTON: During your career, you met people who didn't work for the Service. Did you feel that any of those people could have been or should have been working for the Service?

MR. GRITMAN: Yeah, there were lots of state people who I met that were well-qualified people who could have come in and worked for the Service. There were lots and lots of state people. At one time, the Service basically had all of the expertise in the wildlife field. States just didn't have it. That was a long time ago and the Federal Aide programs came in so forth. They got more money and they hired more people. One of the people I worked with was Russ Stewart who was the Commissioner of Fish and Game in North Dakota. He was an excellent administrator and had a good staff. They were very low paid, but they were very loyal and very good. It was a small staff. I probably worked with Russ closer than any other Commissioner because I was Area Manager there.

MS. NORTON: What Presidents, Secretaries of the Interior and Directors of FWS did you serve under? You already mentioned Gottchalk and Dunkle.

MR. GRITMAN: There was Gottchalk and Smith, and of course Lynn Greenwalt. Then we had Jansen. That's when it really started getting political. I believe Nixon came in when Greenwalt was Director. That's when it was decided that you did not have to be a career employee to be Director of the Service. That was the political decision that was made.

MS. NORTON: If you can't remember, it's okay.

MR. GRITMAN: Well, there's some people you try to forget you know!

MS. NORTON: Well you would know probably more about that than anybody because you had more relations with the Director than we did out in the Clerk Typist type jobs.

MR. GRITMAN: I'm trying to think of these people. I know them but I can't think of the names!

MS. NORTON: One of the people that people mention sometimes is James Watt.

MR. GRITMAN: Oh, he was Secretary of the Interior, right?

MS. NORTON: And that was a detriment, right?

MR. GRITMAN: Oh yes, definitely he was. You have to realize that the current Secretary worked for James Watt. That ought to tell you something. She had a lot to do with Watt and his policies. So I can see some of that; like the drilling for oil in Alaska, the changes in some of the regulations. I look at Senator Lott from Mississippi who got extra days of hunting for the State of Mississippi. That never would have occurred. I mean, that's the first time in my knowledge that that ever occurred. I was on the Regs Committee for Interior, but we were kind of held hostage by him, the Service was. I just

don't think there is any place for that type of politics when it comes to the natural resources.

MS. NORTON: How do you feel the changes in administrations affected our work?

MR. GRITMAN: Oh, every administration did. That's why I retired when I did. I was not going to go through another election year having to come up with great things that the administration had done when they really hadn't done them. That's basically really what it came down to. I was not going to go through another one of those where you have to go in and say that. I don't care whether it was Democratic or Republican, they are all the same.

MS. NORTON: Did you feel that any of the funding changes affected our work?

MR. GRITMAN: No.

MS. NORTON: In your opinion, who do you think the individual were who shaped the FWS?

MR. GRITMAN: I'd have to say Ding Darling. And there was J. Clark Salyer from the Refuge standpoint. He had a lot to do with it. There were Directors after that like Jansen. He used to be in Region 3, and then became Director. All of these people had come up. They had all served in the field in one capacity or another. They understood the Service. They understood the employees. They knew what hardships some employees had to go through. Once it became really political and they started naming State Directors and others as Directors, they didn't have this background at all, and they don't have it today. About the only time I see the Director now is on a hunting on fishing program on TV. But I don't see him doing anything great for the critters.

MS. NORTON: Who is the Director now?

MR. GRITMAN: Williams, from the state of Kansas.

MS. NORTON: Oh, that's right.

MR. GRITMAN: I thought he might be a good one from his credentials, but I don't see that.

MS. NORTON: What was the high point of your career?

MR. GRITMAN: There were two; being the Area Manager in Bismarck, North Dakota was definitely a high point in my career. Definitely. There was a lot accomplished there.

I had an outstanding staff. I had Lyle Schoonover who had been in Refuges basically his entire career. He was an outstanding individual who was highly respected and highly thought of. He headed up Refuges and Wildlife. I had Beau Madden who I got from Region 3. He coined the phrase, "save the dirt". He headed up Ecological Services in the Area. I also had Wally Stukey who was Fisheries. I just had an outstanding staff. These people were all recruited from within the then Region 6 boundaries because we had certain guidelines we had to go by. One was that we could not recruit outside of the region. We could not increase our budget by getting someone from outside the region and bringing their salary with them. Everything had to be done within the Region. The only reason I got Beau Madden from Region 3 was that they were doing away with his position. Don't ask me why they were, I have no idea! But that's the only reason I got him from outside the Region. The rest of them were all from within the Region. That was one highlight. The other was being Regional Director in Region 3, and that Region starting the wetlands restoration program that we had on private lands. That had always been my goal ever since I had been the Area Manager in Bismarck. If we could start restoring wetlands, rather than draining them; then I could say we were making headway. It was the Ag program that they set up with CRP and people signing for ten years. It was the landowners having to sign up for ten years that opened the door for us to do this. We started by getting a list of all of the farmers who had signed up for CRP, how many acres they had, where they were located. Then we looked to see if there were any former wetlands on that property that could be restored. The thing now is a nationwide program. It was not easy to get going because we had no funding for it. However, Regional Directors do have a discretionary fund that they can shift around in various programs. That's what we did. I had people from Refuges and people from Fisheries in the Washington Office just raising hell saying that we couldn't do that with "our" monies. But I already had a Solicitor's opinion that said if we got a signing agreement with the landowners, then it was part of the Refuge System and we could spend Refuge money to do it. That was pointed out to people and they kind of backed off a little bit, but it was very difficult to get going. But once it started it went like gangbusters.

MS. NORTON: What was the low point in your career?

MR. GRITMAN: I really never had a low point!

MS. NORTON: That's good. See, that's what I said too, when I interviewed myself.

MR. GRITMAN: Well, there was one, I guess. It was like the worst occasion that I ever had. It was having to tell Beau Madden that his son had drowned. That was the worst deal I ever had.

MS. NORTON: But you got through it all right?

MR. GRITMAN: Oh yeah.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever have a dangerous or frightening experience?

MR. GRITMAN: I guess there were times when we were hazing geese at Horicon Refuge and tipped over in the middle of the night, at midnight in a Grumman Sport canoe. That was a kind of harrowing experience. Of course, I was much younger at the time, but the guy I was with was quite a bit older, and I was a bit worried about him. He didn't respond when I called out and asked where he was. I found him, and he was hanging on the boat the same as I was. That was a harrowing experience. But Marshall Stennant was to meet us at midnight and we were supposed to come out of the marsh. We weren't there at midnight but he waited. Then he could hear us because we were paddling. When we tipped over the boat's motor seized. So we paddled up and Marshall was there. I remember he asked if we were all right, and I asked him if he had his bottle of Jim Beam with him because I sure needed a drink!

MS. NORTON: What was your most humorous experience? You can probably think of so many!

MR. GRITMAN: Oh yeah, there were a lot of them. Probably the most...most of my humorous experiences were tied to individuals; like Ed Collins. We were banding geese and goslings at Necedah Refuge. Ed said that he would take the boat in the pool and block the geese from going that way so that they would go into the drive trap; they would go into the nets and into the trap. Howard Lepkey was the Assistant Manager then and Howard and I were on shore. It kind of hilly and I couldn't see out there. Howard just busted out laughing. I asked him what he was laughing at and he said, "You'll never believe this, Ed just fell out of the boat!" But there were lots of humorous things that happened.

MS. NORTON: What would you like to tell other people about your career and the FWS?

MR. GRITMAN: I don't miss being Regional Director at all. I miss all of the people. I think that the FWS has very dedicated employees and most of them are very considerate of each other and of the various divisions that are within the Service. I think they all work very well together. I can see certain things happening that I don't like to see. One of the greatest losses that the Service had was when they lost Wildlife Research. I don't think should ever have gone to USGS, it doesn't fit. That really bothered me. I can remember asking the person that replaced me as Regional Director how that ever happened. He said that the Secretary wanted it to happen so it did. I said, "You mean to tell me that no one really told the Secretary that this was the wrong way to go?" He said, "Well, I don't know, but we never had the opportunity." I asked him if it ever came up at Directorate meetings. He said that it didn't come up for discussion. They were just told that this was going to happen. Those things bother me when things like that happen.

MS. NORTON: So that was one of the changes that you observed in the Service. Did you notice any change in the personnel and in the environment?

MR. GRITMAN: Things are much more political, I think, today. It used to be that we were looked at for our expertise. I think they are making us now make political decisions rather than biological decisions. I don't think that's right.

MS. NORTON: What are your thoughts on the future? Where do you see the Service heading in the next decade?

MR. GRITMAN: I think the Service has all kinds of problems right now. Refuges want to split off. I'd had to see that. I have said that if Refuges leave the Service, the Service will no longer exist. It will be absorbed by other agencies such as USGS, EPA, it would just be gone.

MS. NORTON: Where would Law Enforcement go? We just don't know. Do you have any photographs or documents or anything that you would want to donate, or to add to this interview?

MR. GRITMAN: Not really.

MS. NORTON: Who else do feel it would be really important for us to interview?

MR. GRITMAN: There was one individual, but he'd died. Chesley Dinkens was a person that started at a Refuge as a CCC. Then he later became Refuge Manager. He basically created that Refuge. You don't have that any more. Times have changed so much.

MS. NORTON: Is he the one who is deceased?

MR. GRITMAN: Yeah, he died. But Lyle Schoonover lives in Grand Junction, Colorado now. He's a real good one I think you should talk to. Arch Hewlett is another one.

MS. NORTON: Oh yes, he's in Virginia. He wanted me to come down and so him.

MR. GRITMAN: He's in Richmond, Virginia. I am thinking of some of these that should have been done; like Forest Carpenter. If he could have been interviewed. There are so many people that are gone now.

MS. NORTON: Yes, I know. One thing I do try to do Jim, is if I know some of them, and I know how old some of them are. I try and get to them. I've done Art Hawkins; he was ninety! I interviewed him on his birthday. He sent me a thank you card for the

birthday card I sent him. He asked me where I got this “ninety business”. He told me that he was going backwards and that he was now eighty and next year he would be seventy! Then he said he’d start going up again! I think it’s important to get them. Bernie Palas is going to be ninety-two and I did him some time ago. And Don Gray is ninety-two. What a memory! And it’s important to get those. It’s easier to get the ones who just retired now, that are in the cities. But I do try to look at names that I know and remember from working in Region 3. I will try to do as many as I can. But it is sad; like Forest Carpenter, he would have been an excellent interview.

MR. GRITMAN: Forest Carpenter and Harvey Willoughby are both gone now, but they were both special people for me. They really were.

MS. NORTON: That’s about all the questions I had. Is there anything you want to add? Anything you want to say?

MR. GRITMAN: No.

MS. NORTON: Would you like to have a copy of this when it’s transcribed?

MR. GRITMAN: No.

MS. NORTON: Okay, well thanks Jim for the time.

MR. GRITMAN: Alrighty.